

## Michaud Bill to Improve VA Substance Use Disorder Services Cleared for Full House Consideration

Tuesday, April 29 2008

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congressman Mike Michaud, Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, announced the passage of multiple bills during a markup of the full Veterans' Affairs Committee. Two health care related bills sponsored by Michaud are among the bills now cleared for full House consideration. H.R. 5554 would expand and improve Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care services available to veterans for substance use disorders.

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"Over the past several years, Congress has increased funding for VA substance use treatment programs," said Michaud. "I believe that continued and adequate funding is extremely important to the health and well being of our veterans and their families. Substance use frequently co-occurs with other mental health conditions. VA needs to rededicate itself to providing services that can address both substance abuse and other mental health conditions such as PTSD."

Of the approximately 300,000 veterans from Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom who have accessed VA health care, nearly 50,000 have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder. Additionally, more than 70% of homeless veterans suffer from alcohol and other drug abuse problems.

H.R. 5554, which is named the "Justin Bailey Veterans Substance Use Disorders Prevention and Treatment Act of 2008," would require the VA to provide the full continuum of care for substance use disorders, and it will require this full spectrum of care to be available at every VA medical center. The legislation also directs the VA to conduct a pilot program for internet-based substance use disorder treatment for veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

"Stigma associated with seeking treatment for mental health disorders has been demonstrated to prevent some veterans from seeking treatment at a medical facility operated by the Department of Defense or the VA," said Michaud. "This internet-based pilot program will help VA reach rural veterans who lack ready access to a medical facility. The committee realizes that substance use conditions are complex issues. As the chair of the health subcommittee, I will continue monitoring VA's efforts to reach those in most need."

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Bills marked up and passed:

1. H.R. 2790, as amended - To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the position of Director of Physician Assistant Services within the office of the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health.

2. H.R. 3819 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to reimburse veterans receiving emergency treatment in non-Department of Veterans Affairs facilities for such treatment until such veterans are transferred to Department facilities, and for other purposes.

3. H.R. 5729 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide comprehensive health care to children of Vietnam veterans born with Spina Bifida, and for other purposes.

4. H.R. 5554, as amended - To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand and improve health care services available to veterans from the Department of Veterans Affairs for substance use disorders, and for other purposes.

5. H.R. 5856 - To authorize major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009, and for other purposes.

6. H.R. 3681 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to advertise in the national media to promote awareness of benefits under laws administered by the Secretary.

7. H.R. 3889, as amended - To amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a longitudinal study of the vocational rehabilitation programs administered by the Secretary.

8. H.R. 4883 - To amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for a limitation on the sale, foreclosure, or seizure of property owned by a servicemember during the one-year period following the servicemember's period of military service.

9. H.R. 4884, as amended - To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the home loan guaranty programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

10. H.R. 4889, as amended - To amend title 38, United States Code, to recodify as part of that title chapter 1607 of title 10, United States Code.

11. H.R. 5664, as amended - To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to update at least once every six years the plans and specifications for specially adapted housing furnished to veterans by the Secretary.

12. H.R. 5684, as amended - To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the basic educational assistance program administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

13. H.R. 5826 - To increase, effective as of December 1, 2008, the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

14. H.R. 5892 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to modernize the disability benefits claims processing system of the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure the accurate and timely delivery of compensation to veterans and their families and survivors, and for other purposes.